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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 COLOMBO 000647

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA; PLS PASS TO USTR J. ROSENBAUM

NSC FOR E. MILLARD; TREASURY FOR R. ADKINS; COMMERCE FOR  
A. BENAISSA

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TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL PINR ECON CE

SUBJECT: Sri Lanka: Biographic data on new Cabinet ministers

Refs: Colombo 637, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.  
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) As reported Reftel, Sri Lanka's new cabinet was sworn in on April 10. (FYI. President Kumaratunga retained control of the defense and internal security portfolios -- see Reftels. Due to a dispute with President Kumaratunga, the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, "JVP," has not yet assumed the handful of ministerial positions it was promised before the election.) Biographic data on key ministers follows:

BEGIN BIO-DATA:

(Biographic data on new Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, who is also Minister of Highways, is contained in Reftels.)

-- Lakshman KADIRGAMAR, 70, is the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is also a senior Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) MP and a close adviser to President Kumaratunga. Kadirgamar was foreign minister from 1994 to 2001 in the then-People's Alliance (PA) government. Oxford-educated, Kadirgamar was an extremely successful lawyer and was considered a world-class authority on intellectual property rights before joining the PA government in 1994. During his previous tenure as foreign minister, Kadirgamar's key duty was dealing with the ethnic conflict, and, in that role, he served as international spokesman for the GSL's perspective on the war. He was also heavily involved in the public presentation of the GSL's policies on the war to the Sri Lankan public. In general, Kadirgamar is a moderate on peace-related issues, expressing strong support for a negotiated settlement to the conflict and moves toward ethnic reconciliation. He is also a strong advocate of human rights protections. He remains deeply suspicious of the Tiger leadership and is reluctant to trust the group too much in the negotiating process. The Tigers do not look at Kadirgamar, a fellow Tamil, in a positive fashion, to put it mildly. (His house in Colombo is heavily guarded by GSL security forces due to concerns of a possible attack by the Tigers.) While friendly to the U.S., Kadirgamar is an advocate of "NAM," "G-77" approaches on international issues. He is a Christian and is married.

-- Anura BANDARANAIKE, 54, is the new Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment Promotion. He is the younger brother of President Kumaratunga and a senior SLFP MP. Bandaranaike first entered Parliament in 1983 and continues to represent Gampaha District, which is located northeast of Colombo. Bandaranaike has had a checkered political career, joining the SLFP in 1973, but resigning to join the United National Party (UNP) in 11993. He was Speaker of Parliament for a brief period from 2000-2001 and, in late 2001, suddenly rejoined the SLFP. Bandaranaike is known to have an up-and-down relationship with his sister, the President, but he has access to her and is known to provide her with advice on political issues. He has made no secret of his desire to succeed his sister as leader of the SLFP and to become president of the country one day. Of late, he has cultivated ties to the radical JVP. Bandaranaike was an International Visitor Program (IVP) participant in 1975. He was educated at Royal College, a prestigious high school in Colombo, and the University of London. He often vacations in the Los Angeles area. A bluff, heavy-set man with various health problems, he is not married and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

-- Sarath AMUNUGAMA, 64, is the new Minister of Finance. He is a senior SLFP MP from the central district of Kandy and serves as spokesman for his party. He began his career as a government civil servant before entering Parliament in 1994. He was minister of local governments in the previous PA government. Amunugama

has international experience, having served at UNESCO in Paris in the late 1980's. He was also an IVP participant in 1971. An articulate, intelligent public speaker, Amunugama is a SLFP hard-liner, with close ties to the JVP. He holds two post-graduate degrees from Canadian universities. He is Sinhalese Buddhist and speaks excellent English.

-- Mangala SAMARAWEEERA, 47, is the new Minister of Ports and Aviation. He is a SLFP MP from Matara District in the south. First elected to Parliament in 1989, he was previously the main SLFP organizer for Matara, where his father also served as an MP in the 1960s. He was minister of posts and telecommunications in the previous PA government. Samaraweera is a SLFP hard-liner and he maintains close links with the JVP. A former academic, Samaraweera attended the University of London and is openly homosexual. He is Sinhalese Buddhist.

-- D.M. JAYARATNE, 62, is the new Minister of Posts and Telecommunications and Upcountry Development. Jayaratne first entered Parliament in 1970. He served as the minister of agriculture, lands and forestry in the previous PA government. The President appointed him as the interim Minister of Posts and Telecommunications on February 7 when she dissolved Parliament. He is a longtime member of the SLFP and was an ally of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, President Kumaratunga's father, when the party was originally set up in the early 1950s. He hails from Kandy District, and is married and a Sinhalese Buddhist.

-- A.H.M. FOWZIE, 67, is the new Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. He first entered Parliament in 1977 and was the first SLFP mayor of Colombo. Fowzie was a member of the Provincial Council of the Western Province in the early 1990s, and was also the minister of health, highways, and social services in the previous PA government. Fowzie is a moderate in SLFP ranks and sometimes has come into conflict with hard-liners like Amunugama and Samaraweera. He is well-traveled and articulate, and friendly to the U.S. He writes poetry. He is a Muslim and is married.

-- Jeyaraj FERNANDOPULLE, 51, is the new Minister of Trade, Commerce, and Consumer Affairs. He first entered Parliament in 1989. He was the deputy minister of planning, ethnic affairs and national integration in the previous PA government and also served as the minister of airport aviation from 2000-2001. He is a SLFP moderate. An attorney-at-law, Fernandopulle is a Sinhalese Catholic from Negombo District north of Colombo and is married.

-- Maithripala SIRISENA, 53, is the new Minister of River Basin Development and Rajarata (North-Central Province) Development. He first entered Parliament in 1989. He holds a diploma in agriculture and is currently the secretary of the SLFP. Sirisena was the deputy minister of irrigation in the previous PA government and served as minister of Mahaweli (river basin) development from 2000-2001. As a "rustic"-style politician, he is popular in rural areas of the country. He is a Sinhalese Buddhist and is married.

-- Dinesh GUNAWARDENA, 55, is the new Minister of Urban Development and Water Supply. He first entered Parliament in 1983 through a by-election. He comes from a prominent political family that holds diverse views. One of his brothers, Prasanna, is the UNP mayor of Colombo and another brother, Indika, is a leader of the Sri Lanka's small Communist Party. Gunawardena represents the small Mahajama Eksath Peramuna (MEP) party. The MEP, which is a Trotskyite party, was founded by Gunawardena's father, Philip, and was very strong in the 1940s and 1950s. He holds a degree from the University of Oregon. Gunawardena was the minister of transport from 2000-2001 in the then-PA government. He is a lively conversationalist and friendly to the U.S. (despite his party affiliation.) He is an attorney-at-law. A Sinhalese Buddhist, he is a widower.

-- Ferial ASHRAFF, 50, is the new Minister of Housing and Construction Industry, Eastern Province Education and Irrigation Development. She is also the leader of the National Unity Alliance (NUA), a Muslim party. In 2000-2001, Ashraff served as the minister of Eastern development, rural housing, rehabilitation and reconstruction. She is the widow of M.H.M. Ashraff, who was a former minister of port development and shipping, in addition to being the founder of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). (Ashraff formed the NUA, after she lost control of the SLMC in 2001.) Ashraff is easily approachable, but seems to lack ease in the hustle-and-bustle of Sri Lankan politics. Ashraff has one son, who is 22 years old.

-- Douglas DEVANANDA, 50, is the new Minister of Agricultural Marketing Development, Hindu Affairs and Tamil Language Schools and Vocational Training. He first entered Parliament in 1994. Devananda is also Secretary General of the Eelam People's Democratic Party

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(EPDP), a Tamil party that is opposed to the Tamil Tigers. He was the leader of the paramilitary wing of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) until 1985, when he left the EPRLF and formed the EPDP. He is a friendly well-informed, interlocutor, who is out-and-about on the Colombo cocktail circuit. He hails from Jaffna. A Tamil, he is married and speaks good English.

-- John SENIVIRATNE, 63, is the new Minister of Justice and Judicial Reforms. Seniviratne first entered Parliament in 1989. He is an attorney-at-law. He was the deputy minister of education in the previous PA government and was also minister of health from 2000-2001. He is a Sinhalese Buddhist and is married.

-- A.L.M. ATHAULLA, 46, is the new Minister of Infrastructure Development in the Eastern Province. Athaulla entered Parliament in 2000, and briefly served as minister of highways in 2003. In early 2004, Athaulla led a group of several SLMC MPs from the east that broke away from the main SLMC. He is now the leader of the "Athaulla faction" of the SLMC. He is a roughhewn politician, used to party infighting. On international issues, he is said to be somewhat critical of U.S. policy in the Middle East, including regarding Iraq. A Muslim, Athaulla is married and has four children.

-- Reginald COORAY, 58, is the new Minister of Information and Media. Cooray is a former Chief Minister of the Western Province and first entered Parliament in 1994. He is very close to President Kumaratunga. He is a lively conversationalist. He is a Sinhalese Catholic and is married. He speaks excellent English and is quite wealthy from land holdings.

-- Amarasiri DODANGODA, 62, is the new Minister of Public Administration and Home Affairs. Dodangoda first entered Parliament in May 1983 after contesting a by-election in the southern district of Galle. An attorney-at-law, he was the minister of cooperatives, provincial councils and indigenous medicine in the previous PA government. He is married and a Sinhalese Buddhist.

-- Milroy FERNANDO, 60, is the new Minister of Christian and Parliamentary Affairs. Fernando first entered Parliament in 1989. He is a businessman who has vast experience in the coconut and coir industries. (Coir is a material used to make rope.) Fernando was a member of the North-West Province Provincial Council in the early 1990s, and was the deputy minister of fisheries and aquatic resources in the PA government. He is affable by personality. He is a Sinhalese Catholic and is married. He hails from Negombo District. He speaks good English.

-- Sumedha JAYASENA, 52, is the new Minister of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare. Jayasena first entered Parliament in 1994. She was the deputy minister of Buddhist affairs in the PA government and was minister of women's affairs from 2000-2001. She is a Sinhalese Buddhist and a widow. She is from Moneragala District, a poor district in southeastern Sri Lanka. She does not speak good English.

-- Felix PERERA, 59, is the new Minister of Transport. Perera first entered Parliament in 1994. A leading businessman, he formed the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party in 1986 together with Vijaya Kumaratunga, the late husband of President Kumaratunga. Since that time, he has been a close associate of the President's. He is a Sinhalese Catholic and is married. He speaks good English and hails from Gampaha District.

-- Susil PREMAJAYANTHA, 49, is the new Minister of Power and Energy. He is also the Secretary of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) (the UPFA is the technical name of the SLFP-JVP combine). Premajayantha first entered Parliament in 2000 and briefly served as minister of education that same year. An attorney-at-law, Premajayantha obtained his law degree from the University of Colombo. Premajayantha has previously held several government positions, including serving as the Chief Minister of the Western Province from 1995-1998. A former mayor of Kotte, a town outside of Colombo, he is considered approachable. He is Sinhalese

Buddhist and is married.

-- Athauda SENEVIRATNE, 73, is the new Minister of Labor Relations and Foreign Employment. Seneviratne first entered parliament in 1970. A former educator, he is strongly allied with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), a now-minor Sinhalese leftist party that has lost much of its power base since the 1970s. He was the deputy minister of public administration, plantation industries and parliamentary affairs in the former PA government. He studied at St. Joseph's, a prestigious private high school in Colombo. Seneviratne is Sinhalese Buddhist and is married.

-- Anura Priyadarshana YAPA, 45, is the new Minister of Plantation Industries. He first entered Parliament in 1994. Yapa previously served as a North-West Province Provincial Council member in the early 1990s. He was the deputy minister of information and media from 2000-2001 in the then-PA government. Yapa was a participant in an IVP program in 1996. He is from Kurunegala District, northeast of Colombo. He is considered a dynamic, up-and-coming politician. An attorney-at-law, Yapa is Sinhalese Buddhist and is married.

END BIO-DATA.

12. (U) Minimize considered.

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